

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 13, 2016

Agenda Item: 2016/2017 Furbearer Seasons and 2016 Quotas

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 30 Min

Background

Furbearer season structure and quotas are defined by the F&W Commission. As information to the commission, trapping district boundaries follow deer/elk/lion regional boundaries and there were some minor changes to those approved by the commission in February with the creation of HD 451 and an adjustment to the HDs 392/446 boundary. Proposed changes for everything, except fisher, for 2016 are addressed below. Fisher is addressed as a separate agenda item. All other season elements and quotas are proposed as unchanged from 2015.

- Statewide: Establish trapping setbacks on federal and state public land for all species at all times to reduce the likelihood of unintentional capture of dogs. This change will extend the regulations and setbacks we currently have for wolves and furbearers during trapping season to year-round for all species including predators such as coyotes and non-game wildlife such as foxes.
- Region 1: Increase otter quota from 23 to 28.
- Region 2: Increase bobcat quota from 180 to 200.
- Region 6: Decrease swift fox quota from 30 to 10.

Public Involvement Process & Results

FWP staff attends District meetings of the Montana Trappers Association each spring. Public comment was accepted at the May meeting and until June 17 and we received 480 comments. The majority (54%) was primarily anti-trapping by those opposed to the practice, many of which were based on a form letter. These comments generally favored all proposals to limit or further regulate trapping. Comments speaking to the specific proposals on swift fox, bobcat and otter broke down as follows: virtually all comments on swift fox favored reducing the quota from 30 to 10. The increase in the Region 1 otter quota was opposed by a 2:1 margin. The increase in the bobcat quota in Region 2 was nearly equally supported and opposed. The proposal to extend setbacks to include all species year-round was supported by a 2:1 margin. Additional comments not specific to the proposals included several suggestions to manage beaver with quotas, and several suggestions that decisions be based on data instead of emotion. The comments also suggested a broad misunderstanding of what a quota is intended to do and how it is sometimes exceeded. It was clear that many do not understand that quotas are set as a general and conservative target rather than a precise number that will result in population decline if exceeded. It was also clear that many do not understand that closing the season and hitting the target quota exactly is virtually impossible. Trapping closures happen on a 48-hour notice and FWP tries to be conservative and often initiates closures before the actual quota number is reached.

Alternative and Analysis

Proposals provide sound furbearer management to include trapping with consideration of concerns from user groups. The intent is to reasonably *share* the landscape, resources and opportunities. Proposals for bobcat, otter and swift fox quotas include current information assembled by regional FWP staff.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale: Recommend maintaining 2015 structure and quotas except for the proposed changes above and fisher. This is consistent with existing information and represents reasonable and appropriate consideration of user groups and the continued presence of contemporary data in furbearer management that include trapping.

Proposed Motion

I move to approve the proposed 2016 furbearer season structure and quota changes as proposed by FWP for all species except fisher.